

BELKNAP

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The Courier-Journal

# ONE MAN'S VISION



By Steve Durbin, The Courier-Journal

## Warheim Park the result of 25 years of dreams

Hal Warheim enjoys seeing excited children running down the walkway into Warheim Park in the Belknap neighborhood.

After more than 25 years of dreaming and planning on Warheim's part, and another four years of thorny negotiations and construction, the park was dedicated in 2004.

It was created on nearly an acre of wooded and overgrown land he donated across from his home on Overlook Terrace, off Yale Drive.



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Hal Warheim, a retired Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary professor and lawyer, donated the land.

Children "take off like bees to the flowers," Warheim said one recent afternoon while sitting with several members of the Warheim Park Association in the park's pavilion. "It's become very popular."

A final enclave with a swing is expected to be completed in time for Sunday's Warheim Park Garden Tour & Yard Art Event, which will showcase the park and raise money for it.

Board members Jim Watson and Richard Perkins lined up 11 neighborhood gardens for the tour, and local craftspeople will sell yard art in the park.

The park is owned by Metro Parks, which means contributions are tax deductible. But it is operated for the public and maintained by the private park association, which has 11 board members from the neighborhood, including Warheim.

He had problems trying to donate the land to Metro Parks, which said a park there wasn't in its plans. But through Warheim's generosity and tenacity — and hard work by residents — "They have made a very, very successful vest pocket park," Metro Councilman Tom Owen said.

Owen said more than \$10,000 from his neighborhood development fund has paid for park amenities and expenses over the years, including \$1,600 recently to help with liability insurance.

"It's a very unusual tract of land," and many did not believe it could be transformed into such a lovely area, Owen said.

Warheim is a retired Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary professor and lawyer who says he wanted neighborhood children to have a place to play. This month's Belknap Neighborhood News newsletter commended him for forging ahead with his vision.

He estimates the project cost \$500,000, most of which he gave, with much of the rest coming from individuals and organizations. Some donations have gone for trees, benches and inscriptions on paver stones.

It also has a new bat house to attract bats to help control mosquitoes.

One recent afternoon, 7-year-old Benjamin Bradshaw came running into the park, accompanied by his mother, Seana Golder; his grandmother, Louise Golder from Washington, D.C.; and his 14-month-old sister, Vivian Bradshaw.

Benjamin headed straight for the swings.

Seana Golder lives in the neighborhood, and "I think everybody with kids ... comes here," she said. "It's lovely."

It's also a good place to get to know neighbors better, she said.

The pavilion has a notebook for visitors to record their comments.

"Dear Park," read one entry. "Wow! You are so great!"

Another said it was "like a secret garden," and others called it "peaceful" and "awesome."

It was designed by Mike Smiley with Environs Inc.

An Arbor Day tree giveaway and an Easter egg hunt were held in the park this spring.

Board member Melissa Firestone, who walks her dog there, said her family moved across from the park after it was dedicated. Her reaction was, "Wow, this is a bonus," she said.

When the park idea was being discussed, some neighbors feared problems with maintenance, loitering, trash and parking. Anna Angelo, who lives on Boulevard Napoleon, had reservations about a park in her back yard. But she said last week: "It's fine. It's very nice. I hope it stays that way."

From 1974 to 1999, Warheim had acquired six parcels from the Bickel Land Co. that were left over when the land was developed years ago. He and others said it had become a dumping and hang-out area.

Geralyn and Jim Clements left their house on a busy stretch of Boulevard Napoleon for a house at the park entrance more than two years ago.

"We loved the location, said Geralyn Clements, a park association board member. "The park definitely was the big factor."

Reporter Martha Elson can be reached at (502) 582-7061.



# The Circuit

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## GREEN DREAM COME TRUE

Hidden  
treasure:  
neighborhood  
kids (above)  
enjoying  
Warheim Park

Situated between two houses in the 1800 block of the Belknap neighborhood's Overlook Terrace, the entrance to Warheim Park is itself overlookable — just a small sign, a triangular rock and the beginning of a landscaped path. Follow the path downhill, though, past some steel artwork and rock landscaping, and you emerge in a

peaceful space populated with plantings, trees, a gazebo and a small playground.

Thirty years ago the then-enclosed

land parcel was a dense thicket of invasive trees and bushes formed by the backyard boundaries of houses on Overlook, Yale Drive and Napoleon Boulevard. That's when neighborhood resident Hal Warheim, who had always dreamed about turning the "dangerous, impenetrable wasteland" into a usable space, began buying various pieces of the oddly shaped, multi-owned property. When the former attorney and Presbyterian Theological Seminary professor retired in 1994, he says he "got out my chain saw and woodchipper" and singlehandedly cleared the land over four years. The Belknap Neighborhood Association took note and soon measures to create a community-owned park, overseen by a newly formed Warheim Park Association, were under way. "From the beginning," Warheim says, "my intention was always for it to be used as a public space."

Designed by local landscape architect Michael L. Smiley of Environs Inc., the park had its groundbreaking in August 2003 and was dedicated a little over a year later. While nominally listed as a Metro Park, the Warheim Park Association and various volunteers are responsible for its upkeep. "I could never have done it without neighborhood support," says Warheim. The pretty spot has become a haven for dog-walkers and children looking for a swing set, and even those who just want to sit in solitude and enjoy the surroundings. A meditation garden will be completed in October.

You can learn more about the project by visiting [www.warheimpark.com](http://www.warheimpark.com).

— Katie Brown